
SCIENCE WITH A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE: DIGGING FOR DINOSAURS AND HELPING CHILDREN IN THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT

*David W. Krause*¹

Madagascar has been good to us. In 1993, I led a reconnaissance expedition in search of Cretaceous dinosaurs, mammals, and other vertebrate animals to this, the fourth-largest island in the world. Not in my wildest dreams did I anticipate the fossil riches that we would find on that expedition, or on the seven field campaigns since. Many of our discoveries are documented in an article in this volume (see pp. 178–208).

What we also found, however, were some of the most abandoned and destitute people on the planet. Many of Madagascar's citizens, particularly in rural areas, do not know how to read or write and have never been seen by a doctor or dentist. Malnutrition is ubiquitous. Children, who are otherwise rail thin, have abdomens that are visibly distended, largely a result of protein deficiency but oftentimes also owing to endemic parasites that inhabit, multiply within, and thus enlarge spleens and livers. Malaria is rampant. Upper respiratory, diarrheal, and dental infections are common and, owing to the lack of access to basic hygiene and antibiotics, all too frequently fatal.

These same Malagasy villagers welcomed us into their communities, directed us to productive field areas, and helped us carry massive plaster jackets containing fossil specimens over kilometers of rough terrain to waiting vehicles. With a desire to repay them for their many kindnesses, we asked what we could do. They humbly requested a school for their children. It was a "no-brainer" when we learned we could get things started by hiring a teacher for only US\$500/year.

In 1998 my colleagues and I formalized and expanded our efforts by establishing the Madagascar Ankizy Fund (MAF). The primary mission of MAF is to provide education and health care to children ("ankizy" in the Malagasy language) living in remote areas of the island nation, which currently has a population of 18 million. To date, MAF can claim

the following successes: (1) the building and inauguration of two elementary schools, one of them in our field area in northwestern Madagascar (Fig. 1), the other in a rainforest in the east (two more are in the planning stages); (2) establishment of annual health care clinics in remote areas, staffed largely by Stony Brook University personnel; (3) drilling of several wells and initiation of a water disinfection program; (4) initiation of an arts and crafts industry in a village starving because the primary occupation, wood-cutting (charcoal production), is no longer feasible since the forest has been depleted; (5) renovation of an orphanage in the city of Mahajanga; (6) initiation of community-wide education programs in nutrition, hygiene, and sexual health; (7) establishment of sister-institution status between the Stony Brook University School of Dental Medicine and the only dental school in Madagascar; and (8) initiation of a program through which used and surplus hospital equipment and supplies are shipped from hospitals in the U.S.A. to those in Madagascar.

Funding for MAF projects is derived from several sources: grants from organizations such as Rotary International, various administrative units at Stony Brook University, private individuals, and American children who conduct fundraisers in their schools. The latter is particularly gratifying because it has a reciprocal effect: children in Madagascar benefit from the relative wealth of children in the U.S.A. while the latter learn a great deal about the country and people of Madagascar. Importantly, American schoolchildren have the additional benefit of discovering that they can make a meaningful difference in the lives of much less fortunate children.

Why am I writing this article? Partly because the editors of this volume kindly invited me to do so but primarily for two reasons: (1) to seek assistance for MAF projects by directing readers to visit the MAF

¹Department of Anatomical Sciences, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York 11794-8081 U.S.A.
dkrause@notes.cc.sunysb.edu



Figure 1. Dr. David W. Krause (left) with teachers and children at inauguration of the Berivotra Elementary School, built by the Madagascar Ankizy Fund. Photo credit: Ashutosh Kaushesh.

website at www.ankizy.org, and (2) to encourage and hopefully inspire other researchers working in developing countries to initiate similar efforts. As scientists, both professionals and students, we have collected and studied literally thousands of specimens from Madagascar, and our careers have been advanced

immeasurably as a result. This is simply our way of giving back to a country that has given us so much.

MAF is administered by the Stony Brook Foundation, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit education corporation established by Stony Brook University to receive and manage philanthropic contributions.